

air architecture
yves klein

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Table Of Contents.

▫ Introductions.

Beyond the Blue. Peter Noever. page 7

Air Architecture: Imagination and Matter. François Perrin. page 9

▫ Air Architecture. Texts By Yves Kein.

Fire or the Future Without Forgetting the Past. page 26

Immaterial Dwellings. page 28

It Is by Staying In One's Place That One Can Be Everywhere. page 30

The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial. Lecture at the Sorbonne. page 35

Project of an Air Architecture. With Werner Ruhnau. page 77

Air Conditioning on the Surface of Our Globe. page 85

During a Conversation. page 91

Air Architecture and Air Conditioning of Space. page 97

▫ **40 Years Later.**

Claude Parent. A Letter.	page 103
Roger Tallon. Interview.	page 104
Werner Ruhnau. Interview.	page 106
Pierre Restany. Interview.	page 107

▫ **Essays.**

The Architecture of The Leap. Mark Wigley.	page 111
Dematerialisms: The Non-Dialectics of Yves Klein. Juli Carson.	page 116
Traveling Through the Void. Sylvère Lotringer.	page 125

A Conversation. Doug Aitken/François Perrin.	page 135
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▫ **Timelines.**

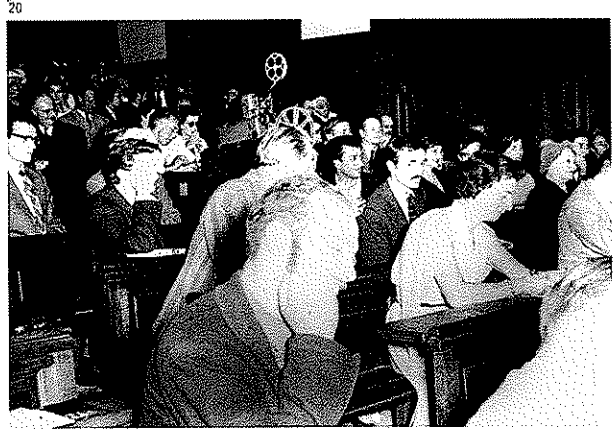
Tangents.	page 138
Yves Klein. A Chronology.	page 140

▫ Bibliography.	page 142
------------------------	----------

▫ Photo Credits.	page 143
-------------------------	----------

My walls of fire, my walls of water, like the roofs of air, are materials for the construction of a new architecture. With these three classical elements, fire, air and water, the city of tomorrow will be constructed, flexible at last, spiritual and immaterial. - Yves Klein

Paris. June 3, 1959.
The Evolution of Art Towards
the Immaterial,
Lecture at the Sorbonne.



The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial. Lecture at the Sorbonne. Yves Klein.

First, I would like to return to Iris the title that she wanted to give me: The leader of our movement. I think she is the leader of our movement. She gathers us together in her gallery and stimulates our work and our research. [applause]

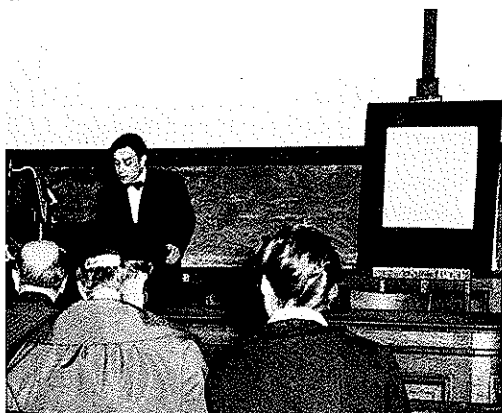
It seems that having now come to the facts, which Werner Ruhnau and myself are going to explain during these two lectures, this evening and Friday evening, I should leap back retrospectively, moving backwards along the diving board of my evolution without losing sight of the end I have consciously achieved, immaterialization in art, in order to bounce forward in one prodigious leap from the problematic of art to a genuine and true reality through sensibility the intelligent existence of which we think we defined such a long time ago, while remaining, in spite of ourselves, imprisoned by the psychological vertigo of composition, reaching the incommensurable prestige of life itself, where personality can not in any way imprint itself.

The architect, Werner Ruhnau, will lead us to the immaterial with a historical survey of architecture through the ages. As for myself, as a painter, I will try to bring you to the same immaterial through my personal experience combined with comments on the various actions that we will review, going backwards in time. What is the purpose of this retrospective journey into the past? Simply, I wish to avoid you or I, even for one instant, falling under the grip of that phenomenon of sentimental and landscaped dreams caused by a sudden landing in the past, precisely the psychological past which is counter space, the space from which I have been trying to escape for the past ten years.¹

This work was unrewarding, laborious, and often accompanied by cruel doubts, yet it finally gave birth to the Architecture of the Air, which is already nearly a reality, achieved by Werner Ruhnau and myself, and which should, I hope, in the very near future, allow us to organize for our own total physical comfort the atmospheric and thermal phenomenon and circumstances of our globe.

First, calmly and coolly, I begin by seizing Arianes's thread, which for me is this impalpable sensibility, this new material, this new dimension, before entering the labyrinth of sensibility with the firm intention of never losing hold until I return. This is how it all happened.

In Antwerp, first of all, hardly two months ago, I was invited to an exhibition with a group of artists composed of Bury, Tinguely, Rot, Breer, Mack, Munari, Spoerri, Plene, Soto. I went to Antwerp and at the moment of the opening in the part of the exhibition gallery which was reserved for me at the Hessenhuis, instead of placing a painting or any tangible or visible object I spoke in a loud voice the following words borrowed from Gaston Bachelard: "First there is nothing, then there is a deep nothing, then there is a blue depth."²



The Belgian organizer of the exhibition then asked me where my work was. I answered, *"Here, here where I am speaking at this moment."*

"And what is the price of this work?"

"One kilo of gold, a one kilo pure gold bar will be enough for me."

"Why are you making such extravagant demands instead of asking a normal price simply represented by a sum of money?"

"Because according to pictorial sensibility as a raw material specialized and stabilized by me, these words spoken on my arrival, have made the blood of spatial sensibility flow: One cannot ask for money."

"The blood of sensibility is blue," says Shelley, and that is exactly my opinion. The price of blue blood can never be money, it must be gold. As we shall see later in Robert Desoilles's analysis of waking dreams, blue, gold, and pink are of the same nature. An exchange between either of the three can honestly be made.³

The public was very receptive; they were struck by a new value and were willing to follow but remained puzzled, waiting for something because they still could not see anything with their own eyes, neither a painting nor any sort of visual phenomenon. I decided to comment on my action and declared, *"You may seem to think that I am attempting to do something that is impossible, that I am plunging into something that is inhuman.... To tell you the truth, that is nearly what I would like. I mean I would like to begin my career as a painter by this action, but alas, all this is very human in the most genuine and constructive sense, in the most classical sense, because it is the result of a long evolution, a continual and persevering personal research, which was often very difficult over the years. A search for liberation, for an increasingly real comfort, more true and aerial than the material and tangible lives we live, stifled and obscured by technique that is the false and illusory view of science, whereas real science is pure art."*

I precisely wanted to reduce my pictorial action at this exhibition to the most extreme limits. I could have made some symbolic gestures, such as sweeping the space that was reserved for me in the exhibition gallery. I could even have painted the walls with a dry brush, without any color. No! These few words I have spoken are already too much. I should not have come at all and even my name should not have appeared on the catalogue. ⁴[applause]

"When technique fails, science begins," says Herschel. Tonight I can say with common sense that Man will never conquer space with rockets, sputniks or missiles because in this way he would remain a tourist in this space. But it is by inhabiting it through

sensibility, that is to say, not by figuring in it but by becoming immersed in it, being embodied in life itself, which is the space ruled by the calm and formidable force of pure imagination and a feudal world, which like us, like Man, has never had a beginning or an end.

You must understand that I am not condemning technique, no, but let us leave it where it belongs. The more you live in the immaterial, the more you appreciate the material. Technique is a means; science, like art, is an end. Technique cannot in any way become a complete entity, or autonomous in the same way as a scientific fact or a work of art.

"Woe to the painting that shows nothing beyond the finite. The merit of a painting is the Indefinable, precisely that which escapes precision," writes Delacroix in his diary.⁴

At the opening of the exhibition of one of my friend's paintings last January, I spoke the following words concerning one of the problems Werner Ruhnau and I regard as having always been most important and human: cooperation in art. This short speech can be summed up as follows: Cooperating means combining our efforts with others with one aim in view and that aim is art. In art without problematic can be found the inexhaustible source by which, if we are real artists, liberated from the dreamy and picturesque domain of psychology, which is counter space belonging to the past, we will attain eternal life, immortality. Immortality can be gained together, this is one of the laws of nature and of Man in relation with the universe: In order to create, you must never look back to consider your work because you then come to a stop and that is death. The work of art must be like a volumetric furrow that penetrates by impregnating with sensibility the immaterial space of life itself.

In this joining of efforts we must therefore individually practice pure imagination. This imagination I am referring to is not a perception, the reminiscence of a perception, a familiar memory, the habit of colors and shapes. It has nothing to do with the five senses, with the sentimental or even purely fundamentally emotional domain. This is the imagination of the artists who can in no way participate because by trying to save their personality at all costs they kill their spiritual and fundamental self and lose their lives.

These artists who cannot cooperate work with their stomachs, their plexuses, and their bowels. The artists who can create together are those who work with their hearts and their heads. They are artists who know the responsibility of being a man is concerning the universe. For these artists, imagination is part of their way of thinking, the continual experience of opening up, the very experience of novelty as Gaston Bachelard says.⁵ For these artists who are ready to cooperate, imagining means moving

away, rushing forward towards a new life. In their numerous endeavors in all directions and all dimensions, they are paradoxically both united and separated. Imagination for them is the audacity of sensibility.

What is sensibility? It is what exists beyond our inner self and yet still belongs to us. Life itself does not belong to us. It is with sensibility that does belong to us that we can buy it. Sensibility is the money of the universe, of space, of Great Nature, which allows us to buy life as a raw material.

Imagination is the vehicle of sensibility. Carried away by our imagination we reach life itself, life that is absolute art. In the furrow of such volumetric movements, with a static vertiginous speed, absolute art soon materializes and appears in the tangible world, that which mortals call, with a feeling of vertigo, *great art*.

I therefore invite all the artists who already know what I have been speaking about to create together, and even more, to scorn their possessive, selfish and egocentric personalities through a sort of exacerbating self assertion, in the tangible, physical, and ephemeral theatrical world, where they know very well that they are playing a part. I propose to each of them to go on saying "my work" regarding themselves, separately, when speaking to the living dead who surround us daily while we are at this work, which we have, however, achieved together. I suggest they continue to say joyfully "my, I," etc. and not the hypocrisy of "we" and "our," but only after having spiritually adhered to this idea of putting our means in common in the creation of a work of art.

I would then find it quite natural and normal to hear that one day one of the members of this agreement has suddenly and spontaneously signed one of my paintings somewhere around the world without even speaking of me or of what I have done. In the same way, I would hasten to sign any of the works that appeal to me among the members of this sort of pact without bothering in the least to point out that in fact it is not mine. [applause] I encourage them to take such extreme, apparently somewhat simplistic, naive, and eccentric measures, maybe in order to show better how, in this cooperation I am proposing to adopt, we will have to consider with contempt the psychological, conventional world so that we can be really free.

It is not utopian to propose such a project. I am trying to reinstate on different foundations a perfect Bauhaus in 1959. I know all the facts concerning what I am speaking of. For one year already, I have successfully put it into practice with Werner Ruhnau, the architect. Together we have created Air Architecture and many other things, which are as yet in preparation. With the sculptor Norbert Kricke we have created, though not yet achieved, plastic elements of water, wind, fire, and light. With Jean Tinguely, for the past ten months, we have been digging together a mine full of constantly renewed wonder: the overwhelming fundamental static movement of the universe.

Next, I insist in particular on paying a special tribute to Iris Clert, in the name of all her "foals" as she calls us, for her high standards and enthusiasm regarding working together, for her magnetic genius as an organizer who in less than two years has managed to gather together, as I have already said, the most innovative, genuine, and determined artists of today.

Finally, by proposing to artists who work with their hearts and their heads to cooperate in art, I am proposing to go beyond art itself and seek individually a return to real life, where thinking man is no longer the center of the universe, it is the universe that is the center of Man. We will then experience prestige as opposed to the vertigo of the past, we will thus become men of the air. We will feel the force of attraction driving us upwards, towards space, towards nowhere and everywhere at the same time. Having thus controlled the force of attraction, we will literally levitate in a total and spiritual state of freedom.

I take this opportunity to answer to all sorts of present day pictorial endeavors called "gesture," "sign," or "speed." I know an artist who has created painting machines of this type. These machines and the paintings they have produced will soon be exhibited in Paris. They are, as concerns a certain abstract or non-figurative art, what the invention of photography was for nineteenth century realism. Just as the academic exacerbation of Realism was brought to an end by photography which, to my mind, allowed painting to return once again to a sense of wonder as it must always do precisely in order to be a painting, a work of art. This is how Impressionism came to be. In the same way, these extraordinary machines, which produce paintings whose quality, capacity to improvise, and variety are incredible and indisputable will, in this technical form of "sign" and "speed," very fortunately put an end to the type of abstract art that for the past few years has led a whole generation to a void that has nothing in it, precisely to the moral calamity of the Western world: the hypertrophy of the Ego.

Concerning the artists who have often attacked my way of painting, I insist on saying that I am not interested in any sign when I navigate in the sea of sensibility. According to Poincaré, we could say that our sensations cannot give us the notion of space. This notion is constructed by our mind with pre-existing elements. The sensations in themselves have no spatial characteristic. "You do not create speed by going fast," he states.

Descartes, whom all the fanatics of this art of gesture and sign condemn and despise, foresaw this technical device, which was to become a scientific object. These painting machines will soon be there, available to anybody who wishes to paint at any speed or in any lapse of time, limited or unlimited, with or without spirit, anger, delicacy, gentleness, and brutality. A good abstract painting, full of extraordinary signs produced by the extraordinary gestures of these machines, which are, moreover, spectacular to the highest degree. [applause]

Having said this I want to speak again about the attempts to coordinate among artists cooperating in view of an absolute art, attempts that today have not yet been easy to achieve. First of all, here is a general survey of the result of this research. It has to do with a manifesto published by Werner Ruhnau and myself, *The Creation of a Sensibility Center*. The task of this Sensibility Center is to reveal the potentialities of creative imagination as one of the forces of personal responsibility. A new conception, the real notion of quality must replace that of quantity, which is now worn out and over-evaluated. This can be achieved through immaterialization and sensibility.

The question now is to recognize that the problematic of art, religion, and science is obsolete. The problematic will no longer exist in the Sensibility Center. The idea of liberty will become a new notion thanks to limitless imagination and its various forms of spiritual realization. The universe is infinite but it is measurable. Pure imagination is attainable. It is viable. It must be experienced in the Sensibility Center. It will be the very core of its radiance. The immaterial architecture, which we are going to speak about this evening, will soon be the main facet of this Center. It will be flooded with light. Twenty professors and 300 students will work there without any syllabus, examination, or examiner. [applause] The action of Bauhaus Dessau did not depend on a space of time but on the concentration of ideas. Ten years later, the Sensibility Center can be abolished. In order to inspire in this Center a spirit of sensibility and of immaterialization, the professors must all, without exception, take part in the construction of the Center. All the students and trainees form an interplay of cooperation in this continually renewed construction. Materialism: All this quantitative spirit has been recognized as being the enemy of liberty. A battle has been waged for a long time against this way of thinking. The real enemies are psychology, acquired ways of seeing, sentimentality, composition, and sentimental heroism, which produce totalitarian worlds, spaces delimited by terror, remnants for the ventriloquists of the Western world. [applause]

This Sensibility Center requires imagination and immaterialization. It requires liberty regarding the heart and the head. As well as the creation of the Center, this program may, to my mind, have an influence on existing schools of art.

Then there is a list I am going to give you, even though it is very incomplete, of a few of the professors who have been approached:

Sculpture:	Tinguely
Painting:	Fontana, Pieni, and myself
Architecture:	Frei Otto and Ruhnau
Theatre:	Polieri
Music:	Pierre Henry, Busotti

Photography:	Wilp
Criticism and History:	no one yet
Economy:	Péan
Public Relations:	Iris Clert [applause]
Religion, Press, Cinema, Television, Politics, Philosophy, Physics, Biochemistry:	no one yet
Martial Arts and War School:	General Dayan [applause]

The cost of the construction of this Center is estimated, in 1959, at \$1.5 million:

The land:	\$300,000
Annual expenses for twenty professors:	\$1 million
Annual expenses for teaching material:	\$100,000
The complete upkeep of 200 students a year:	\$200,000

More than \$1 million in expenses, accessories, and unforeseen costs to be spread over ten years.

The total sum of \$15.8 million is necessary for this Center to exist over a period of ten years, which is really very little compared to what is spent to visit outer space in the fiction-minded outlook of the nineteenth century. [applause]

Going prudently and progressively back in time, we now come to April 1958 with the preparation and presentation in the Iris Clert gallery of the exhibition, *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility*. This manner was called my "Pneumatic period." [laughter] According to the ethical standards I have laid down for myself over the past ten years, ethics that led to this immaterialism and will allow us to rediscover a real love of the material as opposed to quantitativism, to materialism that fossilizes us and makes us slaves of this material, which it changes into a tyrant.

Through this endeavor I wish to create and present to the public a sensible pictorial state within the limits of an exhibition gallery for ordinary paintings. In other words, create an ambience, a pictorial climate, which is invisible but present in the spirit of what Delacroix in his journal calls "the undefinable," which he considers as the very essence of painting.

This pictorial, invisible state in the space of the gallery should, in every way, be the best definition of painting in general that has been given so far, which is radiance. This invisible and intangible immaterialization of the painting should act much more effectively, if the creative operation is successful, on the vehicles or sensible bodies of the visitors to the exhibition than ordinary, visible habitual, representative paintings whether they are figurative or non-figurative or even monochrome. [laughter] Obviously, if these are good paintings they are endowed with a

particular pictorial essence. This affective presence, in a word, with sensibility is transmitted by the suggestion of the whole physical and psychological appearance of the painting: lines, contours, composition, opposition of colors, etc.

At present, there should no longer be any intermediaries. One should be literally impregnated by the pictorial atmosphere, which has been already specialized and stabilized by the painter in the given space. It must then be a matter of direct and immediate perception-assimilation without any more effect or trick beyond the five senses in the field that is common to man and space: *sensibility*.

How can this be achieved? I shut myself up alone in the gallery, forty-eight hours before the opening, in order to repaint it entirely in white. I do this on the one hand to clean it of the impregnations of the numerous preceding exhibitions. *[laughter]* On the other hand, through my action of painting the walls in white, the non-color, I make it for a moment my space of work and creation, my studio.

Thus I think that the pictorial state that I have already been able to stabilize in front of and around my monochrome paintings will now be well established in the space of the gallery. My active presence in the given space will create the climate and the pictorial ambience that usually reigns in the studio of an artist endowed with real power. A sensible but real abstract density will live by itself and for itself in spaces that are empty in appearance only.

In short, I do not wish to go on speaking at length about this exhibition. I must simply say that the experience was decisive and made me deeply understand that painting is not a function of the eye. It was a complete success, and the popular press was obliged to record this phenomenon and that it had observed that forty percent of the public polled were seized by something that was certainly very effective in this small and apparently empty exhibition room, for many people were furious when they entered, and satisfied when they came out. *[laughter]* They commented and discussed in a serious and positive way the real possibilities of such a demonstration. I think I must also say that I even saw many people go in and, a few seconds later, either burst into tears for no apparent reason or begin to tremble, or even sit down on the floor and stay there for hours on end without moving or speaking. *[laughter, applause]* I must confess that all this amazed me a great deal and still amazes me as much today. *[laughter]* How did I come to this state of mind? Very simply, because when you have undertaken something, it is always pleasant to follow it to its conclusion. *[laughter]* And we shall see later, when concluding on Air Architecture, that I was not wrong in acting in this way, although for a long time everything seemed to show that I was venturing towards a dead end. Phantoms and strange characters

belonging to nobody came out of this void filled with sensibility, such as these pictorial sponge sculptures and portraits of the beholders of my monochromes.

But let us now go back to my "blue period" in 1957. It made me discover that my paintings are only the ashes of my art. I exhibited these blue monochrome paintings, all identical, same color and same size, at the Iris Clert and Colette Allendy galleries. Quite passionate controversies arising from this demonstration proved to me the value of this phenomenon and how deeply it affects men of good will who do not at all care to be passively subjected to recognized concepts and established rules.

Each of these blue monochrome propositions, all similar in appearance, were recognized by the public as being each quite different from the other. The art lover went from one to the other just as it should be and, in a state of instantaneous contemplation, penetrated into the world of blue. *[laughter]* The most amazing observation was that the buyers each chose their own among the eleven paintings exhibited and paid the price they were asked. The prices were all different of course. *[laughter]* Which goes to show that the pictorial quality of each painting can be perceived by something other than its material or physical appearance. Those who chose were conscious of this state of things, which I call *pictorial sensibility*.

Why did I come to this blue period? Because before that, in 1956 and 1955, at the Colette Allendy gallery I exhibited about twenty monochrome surfaces, all in different colors: green, red, yellow, violet, blue, and orange. This is how I happened to adopt this manner, at the beginning of my career, or at least how I started to present it to the public. I was trying to show "color" and at the opening of the exhibition I realized that the public, in front of all these different colored surfaces that were exhibited, was imprisoned by an acquired way of thinking and consequently they reconstructed the elements of a decorative polychrome painting. They could not penetrate into the contemplation of the color of one painting at a time and this is very disappointing for me precisely because I categorically refuse to make use of even two colors at a time on the same surface. To my mind, two colors opposed on the same canvas do not allow the viewer to feel the dominant, the sensibility, the pictorial intention, but force him to witness either a battle between these two colors or their perfect harmony. It is a psychological, sentimental, and emotional situation, which perpetuates a sort of reign of cruelty, *[laughter]* so that one can no longer be immersed in sensibility and pure color delivered from all exterior contaminants.

It may be objected that this evolution was very rapid, hardly four years, and that nothing can be done in such a short time, it reveals too much facility and consequently the lack of deep and real values in this endeavor. I will answer that, in fact, I only

started to exhibit my paintings in 1954, in Paris, but I had already been working in this manner for a long time, since 1946. This long period of waiting precisely shows that I learned to be patient and to wait. [laughter]

I waited until this was stabilized within me in order to show it and demonstrate it. The few friends who encouraged me at that time know this well. I had come to paint monochromes alongside my normal pictorial activities, which came to me from the influence of my parents who were both painters, because it seemed to me that color was continually winking at me when I was at work. On the other hand it filled me with wonder because in front of any painting, whether figurative or non-figurative, I felt more and more as if the lines and all their consequences, forms, perspective, and composition were very precisely shaped into the bars of a prison window. In the distance, color, life and freedom, and myself in front of the painting, I felt imprisoned. I think that it is because of the same feeling of imprisonment that Van Gogh exclaimed, "I would like to be delivered from this horrible cage that I cannot describe!" And later, "The painter of the future will be a colorist as we have never seen before."⁶ This was to come about one generation later.

It was therefore indeed through color that I became acquainted with the immaterial. The outside influences, which led me to persevere in this monochrome manner until I reached the immaterial, as I have today, are numerous. By reading the journal of Delacroix, the champion of color and the instigator of contemporary lyrical painting, and then by comparing the position of Delacroix to that of Ingres the champion of academicism, which engenders the line and all its consequences and has led to the art of today. Then to the exacerbation of the line, as can be seen in the fine, great, and dramatic adventure of Malevich, or also, concerning Mondrian, the totally insoluble problem of the organization of space, which has produced polychrome architecture, which our present day urbanism suffers from so cruelly.

Finally and above all I received a great shock in Assisi, in the Basilica of Saint Francis, when I discovered that the frescoes were scrupulously monochrome, blue and of one color, which I believe I can attribute to Giotto but could be by one of his students, by a disciple of Cimabue or even one of the artists of the Sienna School. Although the blue I am speaking of is very much of the same nature and quality as the blue of the sky in Giotto's paintings, which can be admired in the same basilica on the upper level. Even if Giotto only had the figurative intention of showing the pure blue and cloudless sky, nevertheless the intention was to paint in a monochrome manner.

Unfortunately, I only had the pleasure of discovering the works of Gaston Bachelard very late, last year in the month of April 1958. I wish to answer the question often put to me, Why did I choose blue? by quoting once again Gaston Bachelard in one of the

wonderful passages from his book concerning blue: "First, a document taken from Mallarmé in which the poet, living in the 'dear ennui' of Lethean lakes, suffers from the irony of the azure. He perceives an azure that is too offensive and wants to stop with untiring hand the great blue holes naughtily made by birds. It is through this activity of the image that his human psyche receives future causality through a kind of immediate finality."⁷

He continues:

"Other materials harden objects. Also in the realm of blue air more than elsewhere we feel that the world may be permeated by the most indeterminate reverie. This is when reverie really has depth. The blue sky opens up in depth beneath the dream. The dreams are not limited to one-dimensional images. Paradoxically, the aerial dream soon has only a depth dimension. The other two dimensions, in which picturesque, colored reverie plays its games, lose all their oniric interest. The world is then truly on the other side of the un-silvered mirror. There is an imaginary beyond, a pure beyond, one without a within."

And then comes the wonderful sentence: "First there is nothing, then there is a deep nothing, then there is a blue depth."⁸ This is the quotation I used in my Antwerp speech.

For Claudel, blue is obscurity become visible. That is precisely why Claudel can write, "Azure between day and night, shows a balance, as is proved by the subtle moment when, in the Eastern sky, a navigator sees the stars disappear all at once." Blue does not have any dimension, it is outside any dimension, whereas other colors do have one. They are psychological spaces. Red, for example, presupposes heat coming from a hearth. All the colors arouse concrete, material, or tangible associations of ideas in a psychological manner, whereas blue, at most, recalls the sea and the sky, which, after all, is what is most abstract in tangible and visible nature.

Concerning these commentaries on blue, I would like to speak of Robert Desoille's waking dream, which can testify to the immaterializing value of pure imagination: "Imagination and will are two aspects of a single profound force. Anyone who can imagine, can will. To the imagination that informs our will is coupled a will to imagine, a will to live what is imagined."⁹ Therefore, let us follow Robert Desoille's apparently simple method. Desoille counsels the subject who is bothered by a specific concern to put it with all the others in the rag picker's bag, in the sack he carries behind his back. This is in keeping with the very expressive and effective gesture of the hand that throws everything it scorns behind its back.

It must not be forgotten that "we are dealing with psyches that cannot decide to make up their minds and who do not listen to rational rebukes.... When the spirit has thus been somewhat

prepared for freedom, when it has been unburdened of terrestrial cares, then its training in imaginary ascension can begin."¹⁰

Desoille then suggests to his patient that he imagine himself walking up a gently sloping path, with no abysses, no vertigo. Perhaps he could be helped gently here by the rhythm of his gait, feeling the dialectics of the past and future that Crevel pointed out so well: *"One of my feet is called past, the other future."*¹¹

We must come back to *"the directed ascensional dream"* upon which I would like to focus now.¹²

As a matter of fact, Desoille's method takes into account a sort of ascension in color. It seems that an azure, or sometimes a golden color, appears on the heights, which we ascend in dreams. Often without any suggestion, the dreamer, as he is living this imaginary ascent, will reach a luminous place where he perceives light in a luminous form. Luminous air and aerial light, in a reversal from substantive to adjective, are joined in one material:

*The dreamer has the impression of bathing in a light that carries him. He actualizes the synthesis of lightness and clarity. He is conscious of being freed both from the weight and the darkness of his flesh. In certain dreams there is a possibility of classifying ascents as being ascents into either azure or golden air. More precisely there should be a distinction between ascents in gold and blue and those in blue and gold, according to the dream's color of transformation. In all cases the color is volumetric, happiness pervades the whole being.*¹³

This universal light engulfs and blurs objects, little by little. It makes contours lose their sharp lines. It obliterates the picturesque in favor of the radiant. At the same time, it rids dreams of all the *"psychological what not"* that the poet mentions. Thus it gives *"a feeling of serene unity to the contemplative person."*

Desoille's method, then, is an integration of sublimation into normal psychic life. This integration is facilitated by images of aerial imagination.

*An initial calm is replaced by a conscious calm, the calm of heights, the calm from which one sees from 'on high' the turmoil down below. Then a pride is born in our sense of morality, in our sublimation, and in our life's story. That is when a subject can allow his memories to rise up spontaneously. Memories have a better chance at this stage of being more meaningful, of revealing their causality, since the conscious dreamer is, in a certain sense, at a high point in his life. His past life can be judged from a new point of view, one that we might almost say is absolute: The person can judge himself. The subject often realizes that he has acquired new knowledge, has just become psychologically lucid.*¹⁴

Precisely.

Although I think it is now necessary to return to the present day to introduce you to Air Architecture, I must also speak to you about fire and water, a non-architecture, which I want to integrate to this constantly evolving architecture.

Fire, for me, is the future without forgetting the past. It is the memory of nature. The project for a public square with a pool where jets of fire would dance instead of jets of water and building firewalls in Air Architecture, is an idea, which goes back to 1951. I was in rapture at the Granja, a summer palace of the Spanish monarchy, some eighty kilometers from Madrid, looking at the water fountains and jets in the gardens, similar in every way to those of Versailles. That is where I imagined replacing the tranquil surface of these pools, the elegant jets of water with brilliant jets of fire. Fire sculptures on the water...why not? The functional-psychological goal of water jets on stretches of water is to bring a general coolness or, at least, a sensation of coolness. For countries with a less favorable climate, where the cold reigns for quite a long time in the winter, it is a luxury to present jets of water. Whereas it is quite functional and also aesthetic and psychological to present jets of fire on a spatial water mirror base, which forms an invisible, impassable barrier. *Fire is sweetness, fire is sweetness and torture. It is cuisine and apocalypse. It is pleasure for the child sitting quietly by the hearth, yet it punishes any disobedience when one seeks to play too closely with its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and terrible god, good and bad. It can contradict itself, thus it is one of the universal principles of explanation.... It has never perhaps been sufficiently noticed that fire is a social being rather than a natural being. To see the justification of this remark, there is no need to develop considerations on the role of fire in primitive societies, nor to insist on the technical difficulties of the maintenance of fire, it is enough to deal in positive psychology, examining the structure and education of a civilized mind. In brief, the respect of fire is a learned respect, it is not a natural respect. The reflex that makes us draw our finger away from the flame of a candle does not play any conscious role in our knowledge.*¹⁵

On the other hand, I do not think that from the viewpoint of aesthetic perfection one can question the quality of fire. Fire is beautiful in itself, in whatever way.

As for these walls of fire, further on in my speech you will probably understand very well how they will be adapted to Air Architecture.

As for the edification of walls of water against the walls of fire, one must also speak of water in itself in order to understand fully the spirit of water. It seems that silence must first be understood in

relation to our soul, which needs to see something become silent. "And as in ancient times, you could sleep in the sea," said Paul Eluard in *Nécessités de la vie*.¹⁶

The hymn delivered by Saint Yves continues thus: "Ambrosia is in the waters, oh waters bring to perfection all the remedies which chase away illnesses so that my body will feel your good effects so that I may see the sun for a long time yet."¹⁷ Also one must not forget the spirit that hovers over the water. It is the fluidic element, the essential feminine element, which we need in order to establish the balance between justice and violence.

The return to Eden after the fall of Man is well on its way; we have gone through a long evolution in history and reached the height of perspective and the failure of the Renaissance through the psychological vision of life. Today this evolution comes to us through dematerialization leading to immaterialization, and we are happily moving towards a genuine and dynamically cosmic well being. Of course it is not enough to say, to write, or to proclaim, "I have overcome the problematic of art!" One must also have done it, as I think I have done. For a moment I would like to switch to overcoming the barrier of technique; it is a method that has always come from this personal ethic of which I have already spoken and has allowed me, as a painter, to settle in unknown domains without any difficulty other than the usual technical difficulties met anyway by the most well-informed technicians themselves.

For thousands of years, Orientals have cultivated a sort of hierarchical ritual, which, for example, allows a corporation to attribute to the member of another corporation a rank whose quality is equivalent. I observed this in Japan during a training course lasting a year and a half at the Imperial School of Ancient Martial Arts. In Judo the council of the highly ranked members often spontaneously attribute a high rank, honorary of course, to a brilliant scientist, for example, who hardly practiced any judo at college when he was young. Nevertheless, this rank is respected without hesitation by all the members of this corporation.

We in the West must change this hierarchical ritual into an effective dynamic reality. Thus, I want to give you an example of my capacity to move into the field of music.

A few years ago I created *The Monotone Symphony*, of which this is an extract: [sound]. Now a scream by François Dufrène, a monotone scream: [a scream, applause]. Now a scream, listen carefully, a scream by Charles Etienne: [a scream, laughter]. And now a very fine scream by Antonin Artaud: [a scream].

I am sorry that I cannot give you an extract from the symphony by Pierre Henry, the well-known composer of concrete and phonic music, but my tape recorder does not work at the same speed.

Yes, indeed, but it is too difficult to put it right just now. However, it is precisely the same symphony as the one I composed a few years ago, from which you heard the extract at the beginning and was reconstructed by Pierre Henry in a, eh, much more competent way. [laughter]

This extract from my *Monotone Symphony*, which you listened to at the beginning, is an electronic sound. Originally, the *Symphony* lasted forty minutes. [laughter] It precisely lasted that length of time to show the desire to overcome time. The attack and end had been cut out which created a strange sound phenomenon that whirls up sensibility. Indeed, this *Symphony*, which had not the slightest perceptible beginning or end, was outside the phenomenology of time. It had no relation with the past, the present, or the future since, after all, it had never been born nor had it ever died, after having existed, however, in the physical reality of sound.

Therefore, in order to come back to the idea of overcoming my art, I am preparing a big concert in this monotone spirit but this time it will no longer be electronic. I find it too cold. I want to personally direct a large classical orchestra composed of 150 performers. [applause]

At present it would take too much time to go into the details of this project. The idea, which can be derived from this and is related to the subject we are dealing with today, is this possibility that the artist of the Western world, in the spirit of the pure classical fugue, must look for in order to escape from the melody and rhythm, so that the subject is his sole theme and he abolishes the counter subject, which will never reappear. There will no longer be any exposition or episode or development, it is the future canon of the classical fugue transposed into an immediate theme.

I wish to express to you my surprise when I observe what a paltry idea one has in Europe concerning Japanese calligraphy. These poor people who are concerned with gestures and signs have only understood its exotic and superficial aspect. One does not know or one seems to refuse to admit that Japanese calligraphy has in fact developed in this way. [applause] Take note of this, it is true, I am not joking [laughter], that is how it happens. Anyway, it is too much! I want to yell to these painters-Action painters, etc.-Stop gesticulating like this! It is not because you move about like mad men that you are active! If only you could return today, thanks to those terrible machines I have already spoken of, to real art, just as the Impressionists in their time rejected the cruel reality of the objects of Courbet's realism, through the invention of photography and the wonder of life and life in itself. May you be delivered from the torments, which, to my mind, torture you in the hell where composition, speed of lines and shapes do not lead you anywhere.

To my mind, art is not a language or a possibility of communicating for artists. If it were so, a work of art would only be a means and not an end, a real creation. Man alone creates a work of art so that he will no longer be alone, for there may be only one man on the whole of the earth but there may be several works of art. The artists of the twentieth century must bring about their integration in society and stop being strange people. Before concluding, I will have the pleasure of trying to place once again, my ethics, for a moment, in the problematic of economy and in the social structure, so that it will be in direct relation with immaterial architecture and urbanism.

How can I do this drawing from the pictorial that I have constructed? In order to paint, I spent a long time searching for a fixative medium, precisely to fix these grains of pigment, which create a radiating and dazzling mass when the pigment is only a powder in the drawers of the color dealer. It is dismaying to see that the same pigment, once it is ground with oil, for example, loses all its radiance, all its own life. It then seems to be mummified and yet it cannot be left on the ground under the effect of the fixative medium, which is the invisible force of attraction of the earth, because man is naturally in a standing position and looks at the horizon. The painting must be presented perpendicular to the ground like a screen. The pigment must therefore be stuck in some way or other to the support. I looked for a fixative medium that could fix every grain of pigment between one another then onto the support, without any of them being spoilt or deprived of their own capacities to radiate, while being united with the others and with the support, thus creating a colored mass, a pictorial surface.

This is how, by applying the standards of pictorial research to the whole population of any country, with the idea of presenting one day a painting which will radiate in the gallery of the world, visible to the universe, we realize that the monetary system, money, is the fixative medium of all the individuals grouped in a society [laughter]. It mummifies them, takes away their authority over themselves and leads them straight to quantitative overproduction instead of bringing them together and at the same time leaving them their free and imaginative responsibility, which forces them to find their well being in qualitative production.

Thus, the outline of a technical manifesto in order to try and transform the community can be summed up in the following way: Change the way of thinking and acting of a population through a qualitative sense of individual duty towards the national community and a qualitative sense of national duty towards the community of nations. In this way, a whole nation could be raised to an aristocratic pride in its moral standards on an individual scale, truly integrated in society. Thus, an outline of the economic system can be summed up in the following way: Economy is the favorite domain of vain illusions and construc-

tions where prejudice reveals a lack of acolyse - eh, I mean - *analysis* beforehand. Some schools of thought believed they could perceive quite a number of realities. However, such an approach of economic facts too often remained an approximation. Such down-to-earth physiocrats, while they exhausted the outer layer of the sensible universe, were not able to unload the materiality of the cosmos to finally reach the definition of knowledge by becoming aware of the marginal use of space. A new attempt appeared in the thirties with the Keynesian School and the theory known as the *Theory of Full Employment*. But if the cause of full employment could lead to a therapy, which after all can be considered as valid, total ignorance regarding a collective consciousness of spatial reality could, once again only lead to quantitative approximation. Thus, it can be seen that everything can be analyzed in terms of bankruptcy, and the balance sheet of compound economy today can only predict an important deficit. A new era should come about where a qualitative perception of the field of energy could at last orient the fundamental inertia of the living thing towards a dynamic conception of the created thing.

To my mind this conception is founded on the elaborate wealth increasing daily. Thus appears a long fresco, which awaits its monetary guarantee. Indeed, I object to monetary reserves, currencies, the accumulated riches of past splendor, which nevertheless perilously mortgage present structures. From now on, no need for these costly intermediaries whose sham values increase the past gap between intellectual understanding and the very quality of the values that have been gained. Let us now simply look at the intrinsic value of the material, which resides essentially in the notion of quality, and, on this structurally qualitative level, each corporation would be obliged to leave in the cellars of the Central Bank, formerly rid of any metal deposit, the masterpiece of their profession. These masterpieces thus gathered together would materialize the fundamental spiritual orientation of the country, leaving a free access to any potential evolution, which is the only source of progress.

This permanent example, which is the catalyst of latent powers, by maintaining in one's mind a stable sample open to change would at last allow the establishment of the foundation for a fundamentally healthy system based on exchanges free from conjectural quantitative variations. Finally, the suppression of fiduciary circulation could, at the same time, suppress the slightest possibility of a cyclic development producing the classical inflationary spiral. Overproduction, instead of introducing a useless increase in quantitatively countable wealth, would no longer be a pure and simple loss of strength but on the contrary a general emulation, this constructive endeavor would lead to the splendors of the future. On the international level, the creation of a standard representing a spiritual value would avoid the development of any sort of commercial Malthusianism and

would bring about the end of tariff barriers, this idea of quality would have a multiplying effect on formerly antagonistic national economic systems.

These brief introductions on what the economy of tomorrow could be, if we wished it to be so, give a glimpse of the huge possibilities of a system that would at last conciliate the universal intellectual and moral aspirations with the most peremptory economic demands. In such a system a rich man would necessarily be a genuine genius in his field. This would only be fair, after all.

But let us forget these propositions, which are too strict and too severe, and return to the possibility of applying once again this sort of ethics, for example, to the theater. Gradually, we come to a performance without actors, without any scenery, without a stage, without any spectators, nothing left but the creator alone, not seen by anybody except the presence of nobody and the show begins. [applause] The author experiences his performance, his creation, he is his own public and his own triumph or disaster. Little by little, the author no longer belongs to himself and yet the show goes on. To experience a constant performance, a constant manifestation, to be there, everywhere, within as well as without, to enjoy life as a raw material, a sort of sublimation of desire, a material saturated and impregnated in the "everywhere" and the show goes on, a "mono" show, at last outside the psychological world. The show of the future in an empty theater.

Therefore, this is how, through all the research we carried out concerning art moving towards immaterialization, Werner Ruhnau and I met on the subject of Air Architecture. He felt embarrassed by the last obstacle, which even someone like Mies van der Rohe has not yet been able to overcome: the roof, the screen that separates us from the sky, the blue of the sky. As for myself, I was embarrassed by the screen constituted by the tangible blue on the canvas, which deprives one of the constant vision of the horizon.

A few years ago, I had already dreamed of this conception of Air Architecture in my monochrome endeavor but without understanding all its considerable importance and impact. Werner Ruhnau has succeeded in developing and making a reality of this idea, which, I confess, was vague. Man in the Garden of Eden, in the Bible, was, no doubt, in a state of static trance, as in a dream. The man of the future, by integrating total space, by taking part in the life of the universe, which will constitute the first step towards Air Architecture, will, no doubt, be in a state of dynamic day dreaming with an acute consciousness concerning tangible, material, and visible nature, which he will control, on a terrestrial level, for his own physical comfort. Liberated from the false interpretation of psychological intimacy, he will live in a state of absolute with nature (which is invisible and cannot be perceived

by our senses), with life itself, which will have become concrete by a reversal of roles...abstraction being created by psychological nature. Please forgive me.

To conclude, here is the exact text of our Air Architecture manifesto. First, blue light as a building material corresponds to void: Energy must be used in the stratosphere; in the atmosphere, heavy air or any other gas that is heavier or more dense than air will be used as building material, also using optical fire effects, magnetism, light, and sound. Sound will be used against sound in order to neutralize it. On the ground, mortar, concrete, stone, clay, and iron will of course be used as building material.

Air architectures are only presented as examples. Finally, what is important is the spiritual principle itself of using new material for a dynamic architecture. Air, gas, fire, sound, odors, magnetic forces, electricity, electronics are materials. They must have two main functions, namely: to protect against the rain, the wind, and atmospheric conditions in general, and create thermal air conditioning. It is possible to consider separating the two functions. It is proved that certain construction elements correspond to each original state of nature, such as earth, water, and air. These construction elements must always be more dense and heavy than the original state in which we use them.

Air architectures must be adapted to the natural conditions and situations, to the mountain, valleys, monsoons, etc., if possible without requiring the use of great artificial modifications. For example, in a place where the wind changes its direction every six months, the "air roof" can be created with very little artificial help. Finally, it is the ancient dream of men and of the imagination to make use of the elements of nature to order and control their phenomenon and manifestations.

In my development, I was to come to Air Architecture, because only there could I at last produce and stabilize pictorial sensibility in a raw material state. Until now, in a very precise architectonic space, I have been painting monochromes in the most enlightened manner possible. Color sensibility, which is still very material, must be reduced to an immaterial, more pneumatic sensibility.

As for Werner Ruhnau, he is certain that the architecture of today is on its way towards the immaterialization of the cities of tomorrow. The suspended roof and tent constructions by Frei Otto and others are important steps in this direction. By using air, gases, and sound as elements of architecture, this development can be carried yet further. My walls of fire and my walls of water are, with the roofs of air, materials for a new architecture. With these three classical elements, fire, air, and water, the city of tomorrow will be constructed; it will at last be flexible, spiritual, and immaterial. For men, the idea of using pure energy to

construct in space no longer seems absurd from that point of view. In such a conception of architecture, it seems easy to understand that the disappearance of the picturesque and painted reverie is inevitable and fortunately so, because it is the picturesque that has killed all the real powers of Man.

I wish to end by paying homage to Werner Ruhnau with this poem by the great German poet, Christian Morgenstern.¹⁸ Please forgive me for the bad translation:

The Picket Fence

*One time there was a picket fence
with space to gaze from hence to thence.
An architect who saw this sight
approached it suddenly one night,
removed the spaces from the fence,
and built of them a residence.
The picket fence stood there dumbfounded
with pickets wholly unsurrounded,
a view so loathsome and obscene,
the Senate had to intervene.
The architect, however, flew
to Afri- or Americoo.*

These are the words of the poet. [applause]

Werner Ruhnau will probably not have to escape or at least I hope not. For I think that Europe, as part of the Western world, will understand in time the value of our endeavor to immaterialize in order to live without delay in *the virginity, the vivacity, the beauty of today*.¹⁹

[applause]

Paris, June 3, 1959.

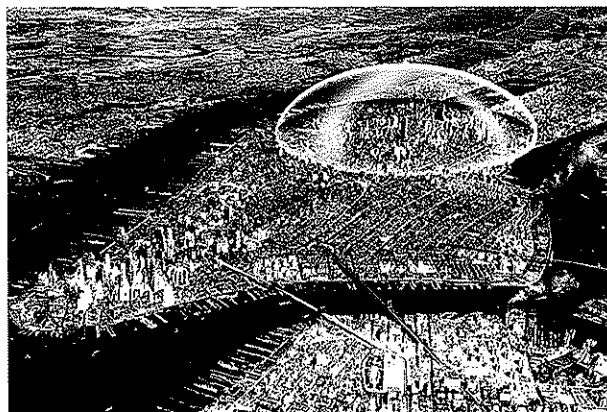
Notes.

- 1 Bachelard, Gaston. "L'air et les songes," ("Air and Dreams"), Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1943
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Robert Desoille, psychotherapist (1890-1966)
- 4 Eugène Delacroix, painter (1798-1863)
- 5 Bachelard, "Air and Dreams."
- 6 Vincent Van Gogh, painter (1853-1890)
- 7 Bachelard, "Air and Dreams."
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Bachelard, Gaston. "La psychanalyse du feu," ("Psychoanalysis of fire"), Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1949
- 16 Bachelard, Gaston. "L'eau et les rêves," ("Water and Dreams"), Paris, Librairie José Corti, 1942
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Christian Morgenstern, poet (1871-1914)
- 19 Stéphane Mallarmé, poet (1842-1898)

Essays.

Buckminster Fuller. 1962.
Dome over Manhattan

69



The Architecture of the Leap. Mark Wigley.

November 27, 1960. Paris newsstands are infiltrated by counterfeit copies of the newspaper *Dimanche, le journal d'un seul jour*, the Sunday edition of *France-Soir*. In the middle of the usual dense display of political scandals, sports events, and movie stars, a headline now screams "A Man in Space!" and a documentary photograph shows someone in a dark suit leaping away from the top of a building. Leaping out and up. Almost flying. Captured in the fragment of a second before gravity will surely pull his soft body onto the hard street below. A body about to be broken. A sense of a disaster just about to happen pulls the eye away from all the usual daily reports on events that have already occurred. Yet the jumper poised in space seems to have no sense of impending crisis. Strangely ecstatic, his body arches itself towards the sky, eyes eagerly lifted up rather than down, arms outstretched to embrace what is coming rather than defend against it.

Who would do such a self-destructive thing so earnestly? The caption below explains that *"The Painter of Space Leaps into the Void."* It is an artist then, the kind of person who is expected to radically challenge traditional assumptions, and might even be extremist enough to willingly abandon the security of solid structures for the insecurity of the air. Furthermore, this man in space is apparently a painter of space. He is leaping into that which he usually paints, leaping beyond the familiar material world. While most of the photo is dark, filled in by the density of buildings, streets and trees, the top right corner is white, and it is towards the emptiness of this seemingly immaterial white void that the artist is fatally drawn.

Yet the artist is actually leaping toward architecture rather than away from it. One of his pointed shoes still lightly touches the building. Suspended forever in the instant before take-off, the body acts as a bridge between the building and the void. Architecture finds itself tied to what seems to be beyond it. The painter uses his body to introduce architecture to its outer limits. Architecture is forced to see itself differently. The meaning of the

material building changes. Despite its stubborn assertion of a clear static form, its seemingly hard outer edge, its very substance becomes infused with the immaterial void.

Not by chance had the leaping painter Yves Klein spent the previous two years collaborating with the architect Werner Ruhnau on a project that turns the most insubstantial elements of architecture into its most substantial force. That the project has long been forgotten is understandable since the whole idea was for an architecture that disappeared, an architecture on the limit of visibility. Space was now to be defined by ephemeral means. The only role of material is to act as a springboard to the immaterial. The more insubstantial a material, the bigger the role it plays in generating a new kind of architecture. The *Air Architecture* manifesto that concludes Klein's lecture of June 3, 1959 at the Sorbonne on *"The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial,"* begins by insisting that all ephemeral materials, starting with the blue sky, become construction materials:

First of all, blue light as a building material, corresponds to void; Energy must be used in the stratosphere; in the the atmosphere heavy air or any other gas that is heavier or more dense than air will be used as a building material air or along with heavy air, optical fire effects, magnetism, light and sound.... Air, gas, fire, sound, odors, magnetic forces, electricity, electronics are materials.

When the project takes its final form, the solid ground of the city is turned into a vast sheet of transparent glass, exposing all the services below to the inhabitants who are endlessly exposed to each other as they move nakedly across the glass surface, protected from the elements by a vast "air roof" formed by a controlled stream of air above them. The only trace of this roof is in its effects, the absence of rain, wind, or extremes of temperature, or color added to the air that forms it. Under the sweeping curve of the invisible roof, a new kind of open space, a "vast communal living room," is defined in opposition to the physical

and psychological constraints of the solid city. In the most radical extension of the realized modernist dream of free spaces of movement contained only by sheer walls of glass, Klein and Ruhnau dream of inhabitants moving around in the gap between glass floor and air, occupying a depth of the most ephemeral materials, like living inside the very depth of a window, happily exposed to the world, neither inside nor outside. A space without shame or solid limits, an idyllic garden in which even a glass house or tower would seem too heavy, a Garden of Eden as Klein kept insisting, a paradisaical state of purity achieved with the most primeval elements: air, fire, and water.

Tall fountains shoot up from the middle of swimming pools and are met by angled jets of fire producing a steaming vaporous frenzy, while people rest on blasts of air or elliptical discs hovering over the glass. Architecture is undone by the primeval matter, which comes before it. Fire and water being, for Klein, *"a non-architecture which I want to integrate to this constantly evolving architecture."* Solid architecture is infiltrated and ultimately dissolved by what seems to be outside it.

This project clearly resonates with a number of experimental visions generated between the late fifties and the early seventies. Ruhnau was a member of the Groupe de L'Architecture Mobile (GEAM), orchestrated by Yona Friedman in 1958, who were committed to the fluidity and mobility of urban life and called for an architecture of the city that was as free as its occupants. In the hands of designers like Yona Friedman, Constant, Frei Otto, and Eckhard Schultze-Fielitz, architecture became lighter and less predictable. Solid unmoving masses gave way to perforated and ever-evolving networks. The early twentieth century architect's mission to dematerialize the wall, the limit between inside and outside, is radicalized to produce interiors so vast that they act like exteriors. A new kind of pastoral space emerges, in which minimalist architectural forms are treated as evolving organic entities rather than fixed enclosures. Architecture becomes as

mobile as the lives it shelters. Air Architecture took this kind of thinking to an extreme, clearly picking up key aspects of Constant's New Babylon project, for example, with its society of endless leisure, its burial of all the machines below ground, and dissolution of the family.

Yet Klein and Ruhnau's vision polemically rejects the use of high technology materials and geometrically sophisticated geometries that characterize the megastructural projects of their colleagues. The usual, vast spider's web of steel space-frame acting as a scaffolding to sustain new kinds of space and lifestyle does not appear. Metal itself is gone, along with all the other materials that have been in anyway reworked. There are no alloys, reinforced concrete, laminates, plastics, fibers-not even a simple woven fabric. The raw materials of the architecture are precisely that: raw. The sheet of glass that takes over from the ground, allowing everyone to fly even when walking, is the most solid and most reworked material encountered. Yet even glass is a material found in the earth, simply melted and poured into a new shape, as is the fire, water, and air used above. To be more precise, it is not just all the technical machinery of the new society that is placed underground. All the new materials, all the solids that have been reworked into new useful materials, from the first alloys to the latest polymers and electronic circuitry, are placed underground. Klein will eventually prepare sections through the project that show the high technology machinery and plumbing running deep below the surface. Only the underground part of the project looks similar to the above ground technological extremism of the other experimental architects. The solid material world is buried so that people can live in the immaterial:

I would like to speak rapidly about a great architectural project which has always been close to my heart; the realization of a dwelling which is really immaterial but emotionally, technically and functionally practical. In air one builds with air (immaterial - material). In the ground one builds with soil (material - material).

This "immaterial" architecture resonates with the thinking of Buckminster Fuller, the guiding light behind most of the radical projects of the megastructural architects. Fuller's conviction was that architecture is, in the end, invisible, that reducing physical form down to its absolute minimum allows the hidden shape of the universe to emerge, that architecture in its purest form is a form of radiation.

Klein likewise had his eye trained on the invisible, and engaged with architecture precisely in order to embrace the invisible. He accepted Ruhnau's suggestion in May of 1957 that they collaborate on the decoration of the Gelsenkirchen music theatre in order to expand the role of the monochromes that had so impressed Ruhnau two months earlier. The already famous blue surfaces were no longer to be exhibited within a ready-made space but grew so big and assumed such a unique texture and three-dimensional depth that they became the major elements defining the space and thereby turning the building into just the scaffolding for an entirely different architecture. This shift in status led Klein to reflect on both the spatial effect of painting and the pictorial affect of architecture, eventually fusing the two together in the concept of Air Architecture. His 1958 text, *The Monochrome Adventure*, a new kind of text that tries to retrospectively monitor the evolution of his work, suggests that in any collaboration between a painter and architect on the decoration of a new construction, the architect should only concentrate on the strictly utilitarian aspect of the building while the painter provides "the dizzingly poetic-pictorial climate all throughout the new atmosphere of the construction." The primary role of the added layer of color and texture is atmospheric, the intangible effect that begins precisely where the physical surface of the building or painting stops, the effect that cannot even be seen directly in the color that is added. The key to the new architecture is atmosphere itself, that which cannot be seen or touched. The role of the painter is simply to add "a sensible life, a warmth, that the building itself will have acquired in collaboration with its

inhabitants but over a much longer time." Color both inhabits and transforms space. In the end, the aim is a certain confusion of the color and the life of the inhabitants. A new architecture emerges out of this confusion:

Color is impregnated in space, it inhabits space...color is free! It is instantaneously dissolved into space... For me, the colors are living beings, highly evolved individuals who integrate themselves to us and to everything. Colors are the true inhabitants of space.

The retrospective narrative of the Sorbonne lecture of the following year explores this shift from paintings in space to the space emanating from paintings in more detail. Again the central force mobilized by the artist is atmosphere. The hyper-visible monochrome creates the "invisible but present...climate and the pictorial ambience" in a given space, and the visitor "should be literally impregnated by the pictorial atmosphere." The limits of the person and room are simultaneously dissolved by the atmosphere. The surface of the painting is colored in such a way that the surface itself no longer exists as a hard limit. It becomes porous, like Klein's sponges, with the color going through it into the viewer and the viewer going through it into the color. The point is "becoming immersed in space" rather than passing through it like a tourist. Like the colored surface, the inhabitant can no longer be distinguished from the space being inhabited. Life itself becomes the "raw material" of the space. The ultimate ambition of the artist is therefore an "immaterial architecture," an endlessly porous architecture, one that does not need to be dissolved any further. It is unlike the seemingly transparent buildings of Mies van der Rohe, a vast pictorial atmosphere to be occupied: "I was to come to air architecture because only there could I at last produce and stabilize pictorial sensibility in a raw material state." Klein insists that the monochromes had already launched this concept of Air Architecture even if he did not at first understand them in architectural terms.

For Klein, traditional solid architecture is an "anti-space" whose effects have to be actively countered to liberate space. The built environment is a constricting prison he describes himself as trying to escape for ten years by focusing on the void. Yet the only way to move to the void is to leap into it. The move from anti-space to space is necessarily a leap:

We will thus become men of the air, we will feel the force of attraction driving us upwards, towards space, towards nowhere and everywhere at the same time. Having thus controlled the force of attraction we will literally levitate in a total and spiritual state of freedom.

The photograph of the *Leap into the Void* made in October of 1960 and published the following month is therefore an integral part of the Air Architecture project. At the time, Klein was working on the final plans for his first presentation of the Air Architecture concept as part of his first retrospective exhibition at the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum of Krefeld. Not by chance, the first *Leap into the Void* at Colette Allendy's gallery on January 12 came barely three weeks before Klein was invited to have the exhibition. The retrospective impulse, the leap, and new architecture are somehow linked together. Each sudden leap into the unknowable future seems to follow a careful retracing of all previous artistic steps, and architectural invention seems to act as the springboard. The momentum grows as the pattern is repeated. The 1958 retrospective text leads up to the idea of collaboration on decorating existing buildings; the 1959 retrospective text culminates in a manifesto for Air Architecture; and the 1961 retrospective exhibition seems to build up towards the first built manifestation of the new architecture.

Klein relished the chance to put his work in dialogue with the architecture of Mies van de Rohe's Haus Lange that had been placed at the disposal of the museum. He proposed a "small presentation of the architecture of the air," and asked Ruhnau to complete the drawings for the exhibition. But when Ruhnau didn't do them, Klein prepared his own rough drawings for the

"urban integrations" of water and fire that were rendered more precisely by Claude Parent, who had helped him to visualize Air Architecture since the middle of 1959. Mies's small domestic project was to be used as a vehicle for commentary on urbanism. In the end, it didn't happen. Yet the only trace of the Air Architecture project turned out to be the most infamous. A gas company was asked to run pipes over to the house (again the technology is buried so that only its effects are experienced), and a huge jet of flame shoots three meters into the air from the snow-covered ground in front of the house alongside a porous wall made of fire. This kind of fire architecture started with experiments that Klein did with the sculptor Norbert Kricke on fountains of fire for the music theatre project in late 1957 and evolved with further experiments with Ruhnau into walls of fire that were then continued with Parent. In July of 1961 it was presented in typical architectural descriptions and drawings in an issue of *Zero*, but it was not until March of 1962, that Air Architecture is literally presented as such at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs with two panels and a scale model of the air roof, complete with naked figures moving happily below the stream of air that cuts off the simulated rain. The architecture of the invisible atmosphere finally becomes visible.

Yet the key to the project was already to be found elsewhere in the 1961 exhibition, the so called Void room that Klein presented in the only closed off space in the house, one that had been added after the war. The only space that does not participate in Mies's polemical transparency, the one that needed to be dissolved the most, is transformed by Klein into his most extreme statement of the ultimate dissolution that will render even Mies's glass architecture too solid. Klein simply painted it white. A white room would be exhibited as such in the exhibition rather than acting as an exhibition space. In making this radical gesture, Klein repeated his infamous installation of a Void room in April 28, 1958 at the Iris Clert gallery in Paris. Forty-eight hours before the opening, he entered the room and painted every surface white. The point was to exhibit the very condition of painting itself, its invisible atmospheric force, an intangible effect that people

had to pay to see, or, rather, not see, and could even purchase. With this empty room, painting became architecture, as reported in the Sorbonne lecture:

To create an ambiance, a pictorial climate which is invisible...this invisible pictorial state of the space in the gallery should in every respect be what has so far been offered as the best definition of painting in general, that is invisible and intangible radiance...one is to be literally impregnated by the pictorial atmosphere...thus I think that the pictorial space that I have previously been able to stabilize in front of and around my monochrome paintings will henceforth be well established in the space of the gallery.

Not by chance does painting become architecture in the very beginning of Klein's collaboration with an architect. Architecture is used to escape itself and present painting in its purest form, the white being more an erasure of traditional architecture, the dissolving of an anti-space. Air Architecture is primarily produced by erasing everything superfluous from architecture where superfluous no longer means just decoration, as it did to the modern architect, but structure as well. Solidity gives way to atmosphere: *"What I want to present here tonight is not the walls of this gallery, but the ambience of this gallery. I painted the walls of this gallery only in order to see clearly in my own atmosphere."* This exhibition of a white room was in turn a refinement of Immaterial, an empty room exhibited in May 1957 at Colette Allendy's gallery to show the most basic presence of pictorial sensibility. The white paint of the Void rooms is now added only to make the room even more empty, the basic atmospheric force of painting even more evident.

Klein's first proposal for the retrospective exhibition includes a white Void room as part of the documentation of his evolution towards the immaterial. The room is both a historical document, a record of his previous installations of Void rooms, and a necessary act of erasure, the dissolving of solid architecture that

makes each leap into the void, and the ultimate the leap to Air Architecture, possible. Klein has himself photographed inside the Void room in overexposed images that efface the corners and surface texture of the room, the last traces of its substance, so that he appears to be already floating in space. The cool space without substance inside Mies's house and the roaring fires outside it reframe the whole building, redirecting the experience of the space and the ambitions of architecture. The ultimate leap is prepared.

A month after the exhibition closed Klein goes to New York and writes the *Chelsea Hotel Manifesto*, once again tying all his different projects into a singular quest for the void. Having continuously painted monochromes for all his fifteen years as an artist and developed *"the architecture and the urbanism of air"* in a way that *"transcends"* the traditional definition of the words *"architecture"* and *"urbanism,"* he contemplates the next step. Just as painting *"no longer appeared to me to be functionally related to the gaze"* of a subject detached from it (because it takes its real force from the intangible atmosphere that passes through the infinitely porous limits of subject and object), architecture likewise takes its force from the endless, intangible, and invisible flows of atmosphere between people and space. Man *"will be able to conquer space-truly his greatest desire-only after having realized the impregnation of space by his own sensibility... It is our true extra-dimensional capacity for action!"* Having spent his career as an artist constructing himself as a narrow bridge suspended between the material and the immaterial, between the outer visible limit of the solid building and the seemingly empty void into which he jumps, Klein readies himself to do it again. Unaware that he has only another year to live, the young artist patiently retraces his step in yet another intellectual retrospective, stepping all the way back to his first works in 1946 in order to prepare for one more energetic jump, one more leap into the immateriality of the void, one more leap towards a new architecture of atmosphere, but a leap that would have to be made by other architects:

Having reached today this point in space and knowledge, I propose to gird my loins, then to draw back in retrospection on the diving board of my evolution. In the manner of an Olympic diver, in the most classic technique of the sport, I must prepare for my leap into the future of today by prudently moving backward, without ever losing sight of the edge, today consciously attained - the immaterialization of air... I find myself before you in the year 1946, ready to dive into the void.